

Enrichment Items

At Little PAWS Rescue we design and make various enrichment items - please see our website for details.



Bunnies and Other Species

At Little PAWS Rescue we have re-homed hundreds of rabbits and many homes are multi pet households who have added a bunny to their family. It is important to ensure a trial period is taken in case the animals do not get along. Be sure to take small, gradual steps when introducing different species together with rabbits and always supervise their interactions.

Cats: Through our experiences at PAWS bonding rabbits to other species, we have found that cats are by far the easiest. Often it is the cat that is more put off by the rabbit's presence. The main concern is for cats that are likely to scratch, pounce, bite or chase the rabbit.

Dogs: Some dogs can go wonderfully with rabbits, however there are some serious concerns for those that show a propensity to chase something fast moving past them, those with separation anxiety to whine and bark, for those that may nuzzle whine and bark at the rabbit separated from them in an enclosure, or to panic during thunder or fireworks and in their distress to harm the rabbit. You should seek professional advice and undergo a professionally supervised staged introduction to ensure that no concerning telltale signs are present.

Guinea Pigs: There have been some reported successful rabbit and guinea pig bonding - these are typically done when both animals are young and acclimatize during their peak learning period. Problems arise when adults are introduced since rabbits and guinea pigs communicate in vastly different ways (guinea pigs tend to be vocal, rabbits more body language). Guinea pigs, being smaller, often come out second best when miscommunications occur or if the guinea pig were to approach the bunny's resource (food bowl, litter tray etc.) and bunny can become aggressive.

Rabbit Enrichment

All you need to know



Little
PAWS Rescue
Perth

www.littlepawsrescue.org.au

Potential to Bond

Rabbits do not need to be bonded to have an enriched life. This is an old belief and we now know that different bunnies will have different preferences.

Some bunnies have wonderful bonds with other rabbits and it is our philosophy to give every bunny the chance to meet and greet to determine if a bunny companion is in their range of preferences.

The factors involved in a bunnies potential to bond include their home and resource possessiveness, previous socialization, enrichment preferences sterilization status and past experiences.

Possessiveness: Rabbits by nature can be possessive over their home, toys, litter tray and food items (resources). For a rabbit to form a bond it must be able to learn to share these items. In many cases bunnies show aggression to another rabbit invading their territory and resources.

Previous Socialization: Bunnies who are well socialized will often know the 'nose touch' introduction (bunnies face nose to nose in order to establish a connection). Scent glands are present near bunnies bottom and it is not uncommon for introductions to include a bunny nuzzling in this area to inspect bunnies scent. For bunnies exposed to these behaviors who are not familiar with these 'etiquettes' it may be interpreted with fear and can cause the recipient to lash out aggressively. This will prohibit the formation of a bond.

Preferences: Some bunnies have no interest in spending their day with another rabbit. As discussed in the next section, there are many ways in which bunnies like to spend their time and it can be valuable to appeal to their individual likes.

Sterilisation status: Unsterilised rabbits are more likely to scent mark more vigorously and have hormonally driven behaviours present, these include lunging, chasing and mounting. Rabbits who have been sterilized as adults may have developed these behaviours such that they are now learned and not a result of hormonal drive. These behaviours can prohibit bonding.

Past experiences: Bunnies who have fought with other rabbits in the past may have developed a learned fear and dislike of other rabbits. Often these rabbits will be immediately aggressive to one another.



Bunny Preferences

Enclosure size: Bunny needs to be able to have some roaming space, an area suitable for toileting and feeding, at least two areas to hide (a castle and tunnel for example) and space to do binkies and zoomies. The bare minimum a single bunny needs is 1.4 square meters or 1.2m x 1.2m, a pair will need at least 1.8m x 1.2m. For more information see the 'housing guide' handout

Roaming time: For bunnies that are not house roaming some time to explore a larger and interesting area is a great delight. Typically if bunnies are going to binky and zoom it will during roaming time. Supervision is recommended as bunnies sometimes like to chew cords, furniture and carpets.

Toy enrichment: Not all bunnies like toys but some will toss and chew at wooden rattles and toilet rolls, tearing and chewing at boxes, tossing various small items and jingling balls, pulling and shaking at hanging plastic slinkies.

Food enrichment: For bunnies who are not interested in the standard toy, a food enrichment toy may provide added hours of enrichment. Toilet rolls with pellets inside and the sides folded in are simple idea. Empty tissue box (plastic removed) with some hay and veggies inside. There are commercial treat dispensers and puzzle feeders available. You can see the range of PAWS toys on our website.

Interaction with humans: Some bunnies can be very needy, loving cuddles, brushing and head scratches. These bunnies need contact with their human and may become depressed if deprived of this. Other bunnies are much happier to come and say hi or take a treat but are not as fussed for attention.